Columbus Metropolitan Area Council 1 Church
May 17, 2012
JR & M Briggs Testimonial

It is always good to be back in Columbus, where we lived —very happily— for eleven years, where our children grew up and four of the five graduated from high school. And when we were infected with the local virus—Ohio State mania, which our sons and daughter as well as my wife and I have maintained far and wide, coast to coast. It has not been easy recently what with all the unpleasantness with the football operation  and the basketball teams early exit from the NCAA Tournament. But we persist and I am happy to report that the mania has been passed on to the next generation —  a grandson has now succumbed and continues the tradition.

I had a colleague for a while who was a Michigan graduate, a noisy partisan of the Wolverines. On page 150 of the Presbyterian Hymnal there is a hymn. *Come Christian to say, Alleluia! Amen*. It is set to the tune *Madrid*—which is also the

tune to Carmen Ohio. and I enjoyed the rivalry over the years—and since I was the pastor, I always made sure she was assisting in worship in the third Sunday in November, the day after the game and I always chose hymn 150 for that Sunday and when the hymn comes to its strong conclusion “Singing Alleluia, Amen,” I would lean toward sitting beside me and say —“Singing Alleluia, O.S.U. Enough of that.

I had the privilege of serving over one of the great congregations in the Presbyterian Church, USA, Broad Street Presbyterian and I loved everything about my ministry in that church and am sinfully proud of its strength and faithfulness and commitment to mission and to social justice.

Columbus was also the place where we made our very best and dearest friends, life long friends: the special kind of friends that when you share the joys and challenges of parenting, the occasional sadness

and losses, the joys and happiness of life in community. And among our very dearest friends are Dick and Marilyn Briggs. And so it is particularly happy privilege to be here this morning to help honor them for receiving the Metropolitan Church Board's President's Award.

Dick and Marilynn became fast friends the first Sunday we were in Columbus in 1974, hosting a reception for us in their gracious home. Our children are apparently the same ages as their children so there was an immediate connection. Over the months that became years that became decades we came to love them because they were great fun to be around, lively, adventurous, gracious host and hostess. And we came to admire their commitment, their integrity, their generosity and kindness.

I learned quickly that Dick and Marilynn Briggs are the kind of people every enterprise, every institute simply must have if it is to succeed, the go to people upon who Universities, Corporations, the Military,

the Non-profits and the Children – utterly depend. And so when I was the pastor at Broad Street and there was a particularly important challenge I, frequently, turned to Dick and Marilynn. Time and time again, they came through. There seemed to be no limit to their generosity and reliability and their kindness.

We— and many, many other young parents were the recipients of their generosity and kindness through a little known but unique Bexley institution —the Dick and Marilynn Briggs Kitchen Emergency Room, Infirmary and Outpatient Clinic. Dick—orthopedic surgeon and nurse Marilyn were on call 24/7. Sue and I alone brought to the Brigg's kitchen E.R. aging parents with aching knees and respitory issues, youngsters with cuts and bruises, sports sprains and , skin rashes, midnight tooth aches. One late evening the whites of our son's eyes began to swell and we were scared to death. Dick and Marilyn though of something to do and say. and sent

us home grateful and relieved. What a great gift to us and many others.

In a new book, *Justice in Time*, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Yale University, wrote: “The fundamental question to be addressed by each of us is, how can I live my life well. And then build a case that the least of us from Aristotle—“happiness is living in accord with nature” to Jesus. “Love God and love your neighbor as yourself—do that and you will “have understood and taught that human life—at its fullest is most authentic—and at its happiest is life that is in some way caring for others. We know now, as perhaps people in history will know that the accumulation of wealth will not make us secure and happy. What produces happiness is service.

Marilyn and Dick Briggs discovered that a long time ago.

It is important that the Columbus Metropolitan area Church Council of Churches is doing this—honoring people who give generously of themselves to individuals and to the ministration that are the heart of our congregation, because the religion that gets the most notoriety, the religion that makes it into the media is not religion that stresses to unify us and does good in the world, but religion that divides and polarizes religion that is exclusion and self-righteous.

It is deep in our tradition from the very beginning of the Judaic Christian ethos, religion has been about more than defining holiness and purity and piety. Addition to those historic , that religion is about goodness in the world.

With the emergence of prophets in Israel at least eight centuries the Era the idea that righteousness is not only personal but public, not only private but social and political and has character. In our religion Amos, for instance, “I

hate, I despise your feasts and I take no delight in your solemn But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (5:21). And with absolute clarity, the Prophet Micah.

He has told you, O Mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God? (6:8).

It was Hebrew Prophetic religion that gave to the world the revolutionary idea that true religion has everything in the world to do with goodness, personal ,societal goodness, economic and political—which is to say social goodness.

Jesus was standing squarely in that tradition when he answered a question about how to gain eternal life. By telling a story about a man who was attacked by thieves who beat him, took all his

money and left him to die. Religious officials see him and pass by. A hated Samaritan stops, at the man's wounds, he can. That, Jesus said is how to gain eternal life, full life, rich and joyful and authentically human life.

This Council of Churches holds up a very important idea—the unity of the church, the essential unity of all those who call Jesus Lord and to follow him, the ecumenical unity that symbolizes and points to and celebrates the essential unity of all creation, the whole human family.

You cannot hear Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan and his unique and radical inclusiveness. One of the sociological and anthropological functions of a religion has always been to define the boundaries of the tribe, who is in and who is out, who is family and who is enemy. It has produced some of history's most shameful incidents —Christian Crusaders slaughtering Muslims and while they .....at Jesus they

encountered the way. Muslims slaughtering Christian infidels, Catholics burning Protestants at the stake: Protestants, as soon as they could, returning the favor. Christian and Muslim militias squaring off in Sudan. Muslims attacking Christian churches in Egypt, Sunnis Shia and Shia gunning down Sunnis in Afghanistan. Religion fueling ethnic conflict and was and ethnic cleansing has been one of the great tragedies in history.

But there is another idea, a better idea a religion that transcends boundaries and reaches out to enhance the other religion that is by compassion. As the Samaritan was when he encountered the wounded Jew by the road side, and reaches out to the other is a beloved child of God and therefore BROTHER AND SISTER, A CHILD OF GOD DESERVING of LOVE AND can, acceptance and dignity, and justice and freedom and full life and blacks—white, male-female, rich-poor, Muslim-Jew,

Republican-Democrat, gay-straight, liberal-conservative.

Righteousness -goodness, according to Jesus is having compassion for and helping in any way you can another human being who needs you.

What else are we here for, if not that? There is growing evidence carefully documented by Robert Putnam and Daniel Campbell in *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. The nation is growing weary of religion that divides, excludes, condemns, casts out and is longing for a religion that affirms, accepts, reconciles, helps and unifies rather than divides.

It is why organizations like the Council of Churches are enormously important. It is why events like this one that recognizes and celebrates the efforts of individuals who do good works in the world, who

give generously and unselfishly of themselves for the welfare of others, are so very important.

So thank you congregation and God in continual blessings to this Council and for these wonderful people recognized this _____

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The impulse to goodness and love is deep in us. Some will remember the name Helmut Thielicke, a leading German intellectual in the 1930's, a professional philosophy and theology at the University of Tubingen, renounced from his position by the Nazis and forbidden to teach because of his courageous and radical opposition to the Third Reich. A brave Lutheran bishop appointed him Pastor of the Great Lutheran Cathedral in Stuttgart, and he began to preach such strong, compelling sermons that the 4,000 seat church was filled every seat. When allied bombing destroyed the cathedral, Thielicke continued to preach at different locations in bombed-out Stuttgart. In a classic sermon  on

that simple story Jesus told about the Good Samaritan, Thielicke concluded, “Let the last thing be said about loving our neighbor. All loving is giving for the fact that we ourselves have been loved and healed in : grow into all the mystery of God where we pass on what we have received and when we learn by experience that a disciple of Jesus becomes not poorer but richer and happier in giving and sacrificing and that whatever his feeble strength he put at God’s disposal comes back to him great … God is incalculable in the abundance of his mercy.

Thank you for being here this morning. Thank you for who you are and what you do.

And thank you for listening to me.